DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 412 780 HE 030 548

AUTHOR Miller, Michael T.; Nelson, Glenn M.
TITLE Student Cultures on Campus: Priorities for a Decade of Research.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 21p.; An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Conference in Popular Culture (Honolulu, HI, January 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Education; *Agenda Setting; Attitude Measures; College Environment; *College Students; Delphi Technique; Diversity (Student); Educational Finance; *Educational Research; Higher Education; Likert Scales; *Peer Groups; Peer Influence; Peer Relationship; Rating Scales; Research Needs; Research Opportunities; School Culture; Student Attitudes; Student Behavior; *Student Characteristics; Student Costs; Student Subcultures; Subcultures; Technology; Values
IDENTIFIERS Clark Trow Ratings

ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify, prioritize, and generate a thematic understanding of the direction for the next decade of research and study on the culture of students in higher education. Data was collected using a Delphi survey technique of sequential questionnaires from a sample population that included 20 student affairs officers and 20 higher education scholars; the response rate was 92 percent. Respondents were asked to list five specific topics or directions that were crucial to or timely for the study of college student cultures in the next decade. Five broad themes emerged after Likert analysis of the responses: technology, diversity, financial considerations, student behavior as individuals or groups, and student attitudes. These themes were considered in relation to the Clark and Trow (1966) classifications of student subcultures. Although many of the issues identified by this study overlap those included in the Clark Trow ratings, the issues of diversity and cost are new, and the issue of student attitudes remains of high priority. Five tables list mean scores for each of the five priority themes identified. (Contains 13 references.) (CH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 412 780

Student Cultures on Campus:

Priorities for A Decade of Research

Dr. Michael T. Miller
Higher Education Administration Program
206 Wilson Hall
University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
(205) 348-1170
FAX: (205) 348-2161
e-mail: mmiller@bamaed.ua.edu

Dr. Glenn M. Nelson
Administration and Policy Studies
5P32 Forbes Quadrangle
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
(412) 648-7106
FAX: (412) 648-1825
e-mail: gmnelson+@pitt.edu

Running Head: Student Cultures on Campus

An earlier version of this paper was presented to the

International Conference in Popular Culture

Honolulu, Hawaii, January 1996

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael T. Miller

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Student Cultures on Campus:
Priorities for A Decade of Research

Abstract

The culture of the college student plays an important role in all aspects of higher education. Cultural considerations provide directions for staff development, planning, teaching, and delivery assessment. For example, student dissatisfaction and activism in the 1960s were parts of the machine that drove faculty and administrators to recognize that the structures, systems, and content of the college curricula needed to be changed. Despite the power of student cultures to influence higher education, the last three decades have witnessed little attention given to the concept of college student cultures. The current study sought the identification, prioritization, and thematic understanding of the direction for the next decade of research and study on the culture of students in higher education. Drawing on a purposive sample of scholars and practitioners, a three-round Delphi study was conducted, and data were considered in reference to the Clark and Trow (1966) classification of student subcultures.

Higher education in many western societies has transformed from a privilege to a right; something attainable to virtually anyone with the means to fund the college experience. In the United States, for example, the college degree has become a basic standard for employment. There is little argument that college students and college graduates comprise some of the most influential constituencies in almost any society. Situated among these individuals are the future leaders of industry, commerce, and politics; individuals with the means and knowledge to influence both regional and national policy development.

While the college experience has been studied extensively from many vantage points (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), relatively little has been explored in the area of student cultures. Nearly three decades ago, Clark and Trow (1966) developed a classification of college student subcultures, comprised of academic, collegiate, vocational, and nonconformist students. This classification, which was once vigorously debated, has only been viewed peripherally in recent years. Attention in both scholarly and academic communities has been directed at the result of the college experience, rather than the process and environment of the experience itself. Indeed, college students and college cultures lack a comprehensive approach to data stratification and guiding thought.

In response to the need for a framework for understanding college student cultures, the current study sought the identification, prioritization, and thematic understanding of the

direction for the next decade of research and study on the culture of students in higher education. A comprehensive research agenda has the potential to greatly aid in the promotion, implementation, and coordination of research related to student cultures. In a time when student satisfaction is demanded on every public and private front, study of the culture of the undergraduate student is an absolute necessity in the 21st century.

The State of Student Cultures

Who are students?

College students comprise a varied, occasionally disparate group of individuals who have matriculated through lower levels of formal schooling to enroll in some form of higher education. The college experience is not limited to the ivy-covered towers that often are used to personify higher education. The collegiate experience takes place in proprietary schools where students learn trades, short-cycle higher education institutions such as community and technical colleges, distributed learning programs, and of course, the traditional bachelor's degree granting institution. With such a broad spectrum of institutional missions, the "typical" college student may prove difficult to define.

Despite institutional differences, the college student has been described as increasingly conservative and pragmatic in approaching academic course-work (Williamson, 1984).

Additionally, students in general report viewing themselves as fundamentally different from the faculty who teach them (Parish & Necessary, 1995). Bloom (1987) reported the growth in feelings of relativism among students, a concept reinforced by Garrison (1995) who found frameworks for decision-making as being individualistic and relativistic among students. Rather obviously, the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and characteristics have been studied and reported extensively.

Difficulties in making meaning out of the existing literature from a cultural perspective abound. Perhaps one of the clearest and most resolute interpretations of the college culture was that advanced by Clark and Trow (1966). The classification they offered was based on the students' life experiences and development, and has been used to examine many different aspects of the college experience, such as activities, involvement, and academic achievement (Maw, 1981; Reichel, Neumann, & Pizam, 1981). The classification proposes that undergraduate college students tend to hold preferences toward a dominant student subculture, including academic, collegiate, vocational, and nonconformist groups.

> Academic students attach greater importance to ideas, pursuit of knowledge, and cultivation of the intellect; they often spend leisure time reading books not required for course work and participating in intellectual discussions.

Collegiate students are highly involved in social and other extracurricular activities; they consider learning from social relationships part of the college experience.

Vocational students are in college primarily to prepare for a career; they view practical work experience as more important than intellectual discussions or extracurricular activities.

Nonconformist students emphasize individual interests and styles; they are concerned about personal identity and are generally critical of and detached from the college, faculty, and administration (Sedlacek, Walters, & Valente, 1985, p. 319).

For the purposes of developing an active research agenda in the area of campus cultures, the Clark and Trow model serves as a reliable and accepted template for examining the undergraduate experience.

Although the Clark and Trow classification provides a grounding for the study of college student cultures, the categories lack an integration of cultural studies. Fiske (1994) reported that a traditional classification of cultures, inclusive of elite, mass, popular, and folk stratifications, is still relevant and applicable to contemporary society. Accepting this range of cultures as distinct streams within the larger global culture, the college student community can be similarly recognized.

Procedures

Due to the lack of consensus and limited previous current research related to college student cultures and subcultures, particularly in terms of research priorities, the Delphi survey technique was selected for use. The Delphi technique allows for the collection of data from a purposive sample through sequential questionnaire, and is noted as an effective technique in consensus building (Borg & Gall, 1988; Sackman, 1975; Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1974).

Study participants were asked to respond to the question "What directions or topics do you feel are crucial to or timely in the study of college student cultures during the next decade?" by listing at least five specific topics or directions. After responding to the question (considered Round 1), study participants were asked to rate, on a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 3=Neutral; 5=Strongly Agree) their agreement that each statement should be a major area of research on college student subcultures in the next decade (Round 2). The third round of the survey then provided group data for each statement and respondents were asked to consider their personal responses, consider group data, and re-rate each item.

The sample selected for use in this investigation included 20 practicing chief or senior student affairs officers who were members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. The sample also included 20 scholars in the field of higher education who were members of the Association for

the Study of Higher Education, who designated their primary area of interest as being student affairs. All sample subjects were located in the United States, and were purposively selected based on their agreement to participate in the study and their knowledge of undergraduate student environments.

The assumption was made that recommendations from this sample could be applicable to a variety of communities concerned with student cultures, both in the United States and throughout the world.

Results

Of the identified sample (n=40), 37 responded to the first round mailing, representing a 92% return rate. Respondents identified 122 possible research priorities for student cultures. However, after checking for duplication, 72 remained to be rated in the second round of study. For the second and third round of study, 31 participants completed usable responses, for a total study response rate of 77%.

Due to the large number of statements, only those rated with a group mean score of 3.5 or higher (where 5=Strongly Agree) were rated in the third and final round of study. Therefore, following the second round of ratings, 23 items emerged as potential high priorities for research into college student subcultures. Respondents marked 62 rating changes between the second and third round of study, averaging two changes per respondent.

As an entire group of statements, participants reached a very high level of consensus on three statements in particular. These included the fragmentation of campus through special interest groups (mean 4.92), defining campus community (mean 4.86), and the increase of diverse students on campus (mean 4.80).

The 23 priorities were categorized based on the general theme that represented the spirit of the item. Subsequently, five themes arose from the separation of items: technology, diversity, financial considerations, student groups, and student attitudes.

Technology: Three items were related to the need for the study of technology within campus culture (see Table 1). There was strong agreement that the new internet student culture is in need of study (mean score 4.73), as is the idea of technology aiding in the creation of student isolation (4.66). A general statement related to distance learning technology also received strong support (mean 4.40).

Diversity: Student diversity has been a major issue for administrators and students alike during the past decade. Incidents of racist behavior and intolerance have been reported in record numbers. Respondents generated and reached consensus on two items related to diversity (see Table 2). Although one of these statements directly addressed the need to study diversity (mean 4.80), the other statement was much broader and encompassed the idea of the globalization of campus communities (mean 4.13).

Financial Considerations: Financing higher education, from state, federal, and student perspectives has long been an issue of concern in developing research models and agendas. Respondents to the current study identified and agreed on two primary issues that are in need of further study: the cost of higher education and how this impacts the access and ideology or moral decision making to participate in college life (mean 4.26) and the results or impacts of institutional reductions in providing student services (mean 4.20; see Table 3).

Student Groups: Eight priorities for research were identified that related specifically to college students and their behavior as individuals or groups on campus. The priority that received the highest overall mean rating for the entire study was present in this cluster: fragmenting campus through special interest groups (mean 4.92). The other highest agreement priorities in this cluster included defining campus community (mean 4.86) and assessing the need for non-traditional student services (mean 4.73; see Table 4).

Student Attitudes: The beliefs, values, morals, and thinking of college students are currently studied in depth by members of such professional organizations as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association. Study participants generated eight research priorities based on student attitudes. These statements achieved the overall lowest mean ratings, but were found to be consistent with existing literature as being

important to understanding the student culture. The emphasis on education as a means to an end (mean 4.51), student apathy (mean 4.50), and attitudes toward life after college (mean 4.50) were the priorities which were rated the highest in this cluster.

Discussion

The idea that college student cultures somehow differ from society as a whole represents a mind-set that appreciates the complexities of the college experience. All too often, the movement toward understanding results rather than processes has guided thought on college students. The outcome has been a static understanding of the college student subculture for nearly 30 years. As higher education continues to evolve, however, college cultures must be again become the focus of academic and practitioner communities. To that end, the current study sought the identification, prioritization, and thematic understanding of the direction for the next decade of research and study on the culture of students in higher education.

Study participants, including practitioners and scholars in higher education and college student affairs, generated 72 different possible priorities for research. Approximately a third of these statements were rated with strong levels of agreement by participants, and these 23 statements provide the foundation for continuing research.

Considering existing research directions, the base of attitudinal priorities may well prove to be the easiest base for

further research. Many of the priorities identified in this cluster may be seen a continuation of existing efforts. Arising from this base, however, are the unique areas of diversity and costs. Diversity is such a potentially powerful issue, an issue seen globally in India, Latin America, and the United States, that for clarity it must be drawn from existing efforts and be articulated clearly and independently before being sewn into the larger framework of the collegiate experience. Similarly, the costs of higher education to students must be pulled from current attitudinal research and economic perspectives to examine the student-centered issues of moral decision making, access, quality, and elitism before being fully-integrated into a comprehensive research program.

. Pushing through the research directed at attitudinal priorities are issues of student groups. Within the list of these priorities are the issues which were advocated and of concern to Clark and Trow and the creation of their subculture model. This thinking of group behavior, however, must then be extended to address the new world created by technology. Technology has the potential to distribute education to all parts of the world, but the residual effects beyond offering a degree or certificate must also be considered.

Interestingly, then, when Clark and Trow's subculture model is considered in conjunction with traditional cultural classifications, a new understanding of students is suggested. Folk cultures, which once were embryonic to the upsurge in

student activism, now may be seen in relation to academic subcultures where technology and isolation predominate. Additionally, popular cultures which serve as a gateway to empowerment now embrace the non-conforming subculture of campus.

Whether the current research provides merely a listing of research projects to be undertaken during the next decade or the idea of academic subcultures, defined in the idea of technology on campus, represent the folk culture of the 21st century, continued research on the process of the college experience is an absolute. The changing environment of the world is so rapid, that educational outcomes will become less of the measure of college effectiveness. While the employability of college graduates will always dominate headlines and mass culture attention, the real value of a college degree will increasingly be seen in the experiences, interactions, and process of attending college. Only through the attention of those willing to study and work with ambiguities and across disciplines can idea of the university be maintained and improved.

References

Bloom, A. (1987). The closing of the American mind. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Borg, W. R., & Gall, M. D. (1988). Educational research: An introduction (4th ed.). NY: Longman.

Clark, B., & Trow, M. (1966). The organizational context. In T. Newcomb and E. Wilson (Eds.) College Peergroups: Problems and Prospects for Research. Chicago: Aldine.

Fiske, J. (1994). Understanding popular culture. New York: Routledge.

Garrison, C. E. (1995). College students, culture wars, and the classroom. The College Student Journal, 29(1), 8-12.

Maw, I. L. (1981). Student subculture references: Ten years later. Journal of College Student Personnel, 22(4), 302-305.

Parish, T. S., & Necessary, J. R. (1995). Professors and students: Are they "worlds apart"? The College Student Journal, 29(2), 168-169.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). How college affects students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Reichel, A., Neumann, Y., & Pizam, A. (1981). The work values and motivational profile of vocational, collegiate, nonconformist, and academic students. Research in Higher Education, 14(3), 187-199.

Sackman, H. (1975). Delphi critique. Lexington, MA: DC Heath.

Sedlacek, W. E., Walters, P., & Valente, J. (1985). Differences between counseling clients and nonclients on Clark-Trow subcultures. Journal of College Student Personnel, 26(4), 319-322.

Williamson, B. (1984). Students, higher education and social change. European Journal of Education, 19(3), 253-267.

Van de Ven, A. H., & Delbecq, A. L. (1974). The effectiveness of nominal, Delphi, and interacting group decision making processes. Academy of Management Journal, 17(4), 605-621.

Table 1

Research Priorities: Technology

Priority	Mean Score	SD
Internet student culture	4.73	.458
Impact of technology and isolation on students on campus	4.66	.488
Need for attention to distance learning technology programs	4.40	.828

Table 2

Research Priorities: Diversity

Priority	Mean Score	SD
The increase in students of diversity on campus	4.80	.414
Globalism and student cultures	4.13	.915

Table 3

Research Priorities: Financial Considerations

Priority	Mean Score	SD
Cost of higher education; impact on access and moral decision making	4.26	.594
Diminishing student services due to costs; impact of long-term trends	4.20	.561

Table 4

Research Priorities: Student Groups

Priority	Mean Score	SD
Fragmenting campus through special interest groups	4.92	.306
Defining a campus community	4.86	.352
Need for non-traditional student services	4.73	.458
Administrative environment's shift from student needs to corporate needs	4.73	.640
Reduction of contact between faculty and students; what is the impact on learning and satisfaction	4.73	.632
Need to address non-traditional age groups as a student culture	4.26	.594
Isolation vs. Integration and how subcultures group themselves	4.13	1.03
Future of "usual" groups of students (Greeks, athletes, etc.)	4.00	.918

Table 5

Research Priorities: Student Attitudes

Priority	Mean Score	SD
Emphasis on education as a means to an end	4.51	.533
Student apathy	4.50	.640
Attitudes toward life after college	4.50	.683
Culture of "how much will my job pay?"	4.26	.975
Increases in student conservatism on campus	4.13	.908
Political attitudes and participation	4.00	1.11
The role of religion in student life	4.00	1.06
Student attitudes toward commercialization of services on campus	4.00	.799